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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
KATHLEEN BLISS

1st *May*, 1946

DEAR MEMBER,

Two interim reports have been issued in the last few weeks by the New Towns Committee.[1] It was appointed by the Government at the end of last year " to consider the general question of the establishment, development, organization and administration that will arise in the promotion of New Towns in furtherance of a policy of planned decentralization from congested urban areas ; and in accordance therewith to suggest guiding principles on which such Towns should be established and developed as self-contained and balanced communities for work and living." These reports have largely been occupied with recommendations concerning the kind of agency which should control the development of these new towns and with laying down general principles for their development. A later report will make explicit recommendations about their communal institutions and social services.

THE CHURCHES AND THE NEW TOWNS

How many new towns will finally be built it is at present impossible to say. The experience of the twenty years between the wars might suggest that while existing towns can spread over the countryside at an astonishing rate, as in the phenomenal expansion of London and Birmingham, new towns planned from scratch like Letchworth and Welwyn are built up comparatively slowly. But the situation to-day is different. The housing shortage is unparalleled and it is being tackled by drastic state action, while public opinion in relation to town-planning is more thoroughly roused than at any period in our history. Although the obstacles to success are formidable, there is a reasonable chance that the number of entirely new towns which will be built in the next ten years will be considerable. A greater number of existing towns or villages will be developed into becoming in effect new towns.

Nothing is said in the interim reports of the relations of the churches to these new towns, but it is quite obvious that this new social experiment presents the churches with many new responsibilities and opportunities. These towns will be built according to the most careful pre-determined plan, and conscious attempts will be made to foster their social life. It is already quite clear that

[1] As we go to press the text of the New Towns Bill dealing mainly with machinery is published.

they will have elaborate community centres and staffs of workers whose purpose it will be to encourage and organize their communal activities. They will exhibit strikingly the activity of the " welfare state " and the new kind of planned society towards which we seem to be confusedly moving in this country. If the churches are to have any effective relation to the life of these places, it is essential that they should not wait until the plans are all laid and the work of development has begun before asking themselves what they can do about the new towns. They must actively participate at the planning stage and try to work out from within how they themselves can best fulfil their function in these places.

Some thinking has been done about these matters by Christians, notably, though not exclusively, by the Christendom Group, and the appearance of this Report and the debating of its recommendations in Parliament will provide a useful opportunity for responsible and constructive criticism in the light of Christian principle such as all measures of large-scale planning intimately affecting the life of the citizens of this country urgently demand.

What place they will have in the new towns is a question about which the churches should clearly be exercising their minds. If they think of their task in these towns simply in terms of receiving suitable sites for their buildings and avoiding unnecessary overlapping, they will be losing a great chance. They must set their distinctive task in the context of a bold pioneering attempt to create some kind of orderly life out of the haphazard shapelessness of existence in modern England, and in order to do that they must have a definite and coherent policy for their work in these places.

THE OUTLINING OF A POLICY

The details of this policy cannot be determined until we know more clearly than at present what the pattern of life in these new towns will be and how rapidly they are going to be built. But the need for such a policy must be recognized without delay and certain general requirements are already obvious enough.

In planning church extension the needs of these new towns must be taken into account and steps taken to ensure that representatives of the churches are present in the initial discussions of new development in each locality. If this were done, the churches could appoint skeleton staffs to work with the planners and developers of the new towns from the very beginning, and prepare themselves to meet new residents as they come into the town for the first time. It will make a great deal of difference to the work of the church if it is present from the start and takes its share in the planning instead of coming in at a later stage and adapting itself to a corporate life already created by other agencies.

The work of the churches in the new towns ought to be a joint enterprise. Machinery needs to be created for responsible co-operation between them. The first residents will probably be people with little church allegiance or experience of responsible citizenship. They are likely to be young couples from large cities, the majority of whom will be poor, the class of the community who are most rootless and with whom the churches have least contact. At the beginning the Christians may be a tiny minority who may have difficulty in maintaining their own corporate life in the midst of a welter of elaborate state-provided social amenities. It is essential, therefore, that from the outset the Christians in these new towns should regard themselves as one Christian community living together in fellowship. This does not mean that they would be one church. Churches which are finding such difficulty in uniting after twenty-five years of negotiation in South India are not likely to do so overnight in Stevenage or Knutsford. But there should be the maximum of co-operation compatible with principle and a realization that, in spite of all their differences, Christians form one family with a common responsibility to the people and the place around them. The work of the churches in the new towns should exhibit the highest degree of co-operation achieved by the ecumenical movement outside, and no denomination should content itself merely with scrambling shortsightedly for the best sites and the best terms for its own work. This can best be brought about by the careful choice of ministerial staffs.

The choice of staffs is of vital importance in beginning the churches' work in new towns. It is of little use to say in general that it is important that men of initiative, imagination and gifts of leadership should be encouraged to work in new towns unless concrete encouragement to do so is given to them. There are many demands on the depleted resources of the ministry and the claims of the new towns will almost certainly be crowded out unless the attention of men of ability is called to the possibilities of this work and adequate financial and housing arrangements made for them. These new towns should provide some of the most exciting and rewarding spheres of work for clergy and ministers in our own day, especially for those who share the concern of the Christian News-Letter for the reclamation of secular society to Christian obedience, but it will require readiness on the part of church authorities to give priority to the claims of the new towns.

The new towns will provide a great opportunity for the Christian layman as well as for the parson. It has already been made clear that the mistake of building vast working-class dormitories like Dagenham will certainly not be repeated, but some of the new towns, in sharp distinction from Letchworth and Welwyn, may

suffer from the lack of residents who are prepared to accept responsibility and to provide the voluntary leadership and detached criticism without which the vast structure of state-sponsored social services will go bad. Can Christians be encouraged to settle in groups in the new towns and form the nucleus of a Christian fellowship? Merely to put up a building and expect a congregation to fill it, or even to put a priest or minister in a place and expect him to build a church by his own efforts will no longer work in some parts of secularized modern England. The best plan in some places, notably the new towns, may be to plant the nucleus of a Christian community in the place, composed not only of clergy but also of laity carrying on their regular secular activities.

The task of the church in the new towns is only one of the many new obligations which are being thrust upon it by the rapidly changing pattern of social life, and we must not so concentrate on them as to neglect other areas, as we concentrated on the new suburbs at the expense of the countryside after the last war. But they do provide us with an opportunity for experiment, both in co-operation between churches and in working out a new relation between the church and the community, which may enrich the experience of all parts of the church.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Our Supplement is not intended merely for our Welsh readers. The fact that it is about Wales should make it of interest to all our readers, for the health of Britain, as a whole, depends upon the health of its organic parts and the health of each part must be studied in relation to its particular character and history. This is particularly important at present, when so much planning of our national life is being done from Whitehall. On the ecclesiastical level, also, we are sometimes in danger of conceiving of our Christian strategy in these islands too exclusively in terms of the English situation. What the Supplement says about the disintegration of Welsh life between the wars adds considerable force to Canon V. A. Demant's challenging question in the Supplement to No. 257, when he demanded to know the use of preaching community when the nurseries of community in the family and region were being enfeebled.

Daniel Jenkins has gathered the material together, and it has been submitted for comment to several of our members in close touch with Welsh life.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

REPORT ON WALES

Wales is still something of a terra incognita to most Englishmen. It is true that Englishmen have heard of the Distressed Areas and that through holidays and evacuation some parts of Wales are quite well-known to them. It is true also that the distinctive character of life in the Welsh mining valleys has been widely publicized, if in highly coloured form, in numerous films and best selling novels of which there have been a spate in recent years. But the actual facts of life in modern Wales receive very little attention, and the characteristic institutions of Wales, such as the Eisteddfod and the Chapel are regarded as quaint and unreal, suitable for philistine Anglo-Saxon humour. However understandable this may be, Welshmen resent it more bitterly than Englishmen realize. The tacit assumption that it is either mildly amusing or tiresome for Welshmen to regard their country as anything but one not very important part of England does not make for harmonious relations between the two peoples. Apart from anything else, the religious position in Wales is radically different from that of England and in assessing our Christian resources and responsibility in these islands we are liable to be seriously misled if we think of Wales in the same terms as we do of England. The same holds true, of course, of Ireland and Scotland, but they are more substantial countries and they are further from London, and we accept their relative independence more readily.

THREE FACTS ABOUT WALES

Three facts must be grasped if we hope to understand modern Wales. First, Wales is a religious nation in a sense in which England is not. This is not to say, of course, that the Welsh are more inherently godly than the English or that they are necessarily better people. But the churches dominate the life of Welsh people in a way which is unknown in England and the national consciousness is linked with religious life much more directly. The modern Welsh nation was virtually born in the religious revival of the eighteenth century. Its leaders until the end of the nineteenth century were ministers and even to this day the chapel is the hearth of the language and culture. The names of great preachers are still household words in Wales and the proportion of people who attend worship far higher than in England, while the social life of the young in the smaller towns and the countryside still gravitates very largely around the Sunday school. As we shall go on to see, the situation is rapidly changing but it remains important to realize that the national culture of Wales is in its modern form essentially a church-centred culture.

Secondly, Wales presents us with the most complete example in these islands of a working-class culture. The old nobility had

become almost completely anglicized before the Methodist revival which marked the birth of modern Wales, and it was that revival which gave the initial impulse to the backward masses of the Welsh people to form a national consciousness. These people were nearly all small farmers and tradesmen, and it was their children who moved into the mining and iron working valleys as they developed in the nineteenth century. These they captured almost completely for the chapels except in those places where Irish, Spanish and English workers were imported in large numbers. The characteristic form of Welsh life is that of a chapel-centred democracy whose leader is the minister, with virtually no class distinctions except in the larger towns, where the situation approximates much more to the English one. What is interesting is that these conditions obtain in the more conservative country-side as well as in the industrial areas. This working-class culture of Wales has the limitations of its nature, but of its kind it must be unique. Nearly every mining village boasts its poets and musicians, its choir, its philosophy class and its flourishing chapel life, staffed by working-class officers and led by a minister of probably working class origins, who may himself have spent some time in the pits or on a farm before going to college.

This needs a good deal of qualification, of course, and here again the situation is rapidly changing, but the unique character of the life of the small Welsh community has to be emphasized. From the point of view of the Church's renewed anxiety to win back the allegiance of the ordinary working man, which has frequently been discussed in the C.N-L., it is significant as one of the supreme examples of a church life which is thoroughly working-class in leadership and membership. During the great depression many churches had ninety per cent of their members unemployed and because of that the question of what the churches should be doing for people in their miserable plight was rarely raised. The churches were quite unselfconsciously part of the life of the people and their problems were the people's problems. Once more, while this is far less true than it was and the slow emergence of a new bourgeoisie which, when it goes to church, inevitably assumes leadership, is an important factor in the modern Welsh situation, it remains true as a broad generalization when the situation is compared with that in England. The English churches are predominantly middle-class, the Welsh churches are by English standards predominantly working-class. It is fatal to think of them as substantially similar.

Thirdly, the Welsh nation is still a very young one, but it is a young nation which is rapidly maturing. It is true, of course, that Welsh history goes back to the times when the English were still wandering about the cold wastes of Saxony, and that Wales was one of the most vigorous parts of Christendom in mediaeval times, but the Wales and the Welshmen we know were formed by the national uprising of the eighteenth century and by the industrial

development of South Wales in the nineteenth century. Further, it is only recently that Wales has achieved the measure of educational opportunity to equip her children for playing their part in modern society. The impact of popular higher education upon Wales has been greater than upon any other part of these islands. Taught to respect education by their churches and already possessing a rudimentary people's culture through those churches, the Welsh people eagerly seized every chance provided by the expansion of the educational system for the better education of their children. Paradoxically enough the economic depression further intensified the craze for education. The mining valleys held no future for their children, and their only hope was to obtain sufficient education to qualify them for jobs in the English market. In the 1930's, therefore, the derelict Welsh mining villages produced large numbers of college students who were being helped through their courses by better placed elder brothers and sisters, or by the hoarded savings of their thrifty parents, or sometimes indirectly by the local public assistance committee. At first, teaching and preaching were the only jobs people went into, but by now medicine, the law, the civil service, journalism and many other professions are being invaded by an ever growing army of Welshmen. Unless further economic depression returns and completes the work of destruction of the whole basis of Welsh life all the evidence goes to show that Welshmen will be playing an increasingly important part in the life of Great Britain in the near future.

WALES TO-DAY

The situation in Wales to-day is extremely fluid, and the present seems the obvious moment for a great work of national stocktaking. The distinctive life of modern Wales was being quickly killed before the war. Economic depression reigned in the great mining and industrial valleys, and something very near depression in the countryside. The only parts of Wales which knew prosperity were the seaside resorts catering for English visitors, and for their prosperity they had to pay the price of anglicization and vulgarization. The transfer of population from Wales had reached staggering proportions. In a country with a population of slightly over two millions, over four hundred thousand young people were transferred to England in the ten years before 1939. Many of these young people were the cream of the community, the most vigorous and best educated products of the land. They went into teaching and other professions, industry and domestic service in England. Where they were not complete social misfits in an entirely alien environment they became assimilated to that environment and became typical nondescript residents of the vast dormitory and industrial suburbs clustered round London and Birmingham and Coventry. This transfer of almost the whole younger population from one of the most distinctive and culturally progressive districts in Britain to the most featureless and indeter-

minate parts of the country with no provision made for their care and adaptation, represents one of the most wanton and frivolous pieces of wastage of national capital in our modern history, and is one of the sharpest indictments of our national policy in the 1930's. In the face of it the surprising thing is not that there is on the one hand a long history of industrial unrest, and on the other a rising tide of militant nationalism in Wales, but that there is so little of them. This may be due, however, to the fact that the policy of transference succeeded so well that most of the vitality was drained away from the Welsh valleys. Certainly any estimate of possibilities of reconstruction in Wales must allow for the fact that already the Welsh nation has been seriously devitalized by the bankruptcy of national planning in the past.

The war has brought a reprieve to the dying Welsh economic system. The mines have worked at full blast once more, the demand for steel has been unlimited, the farmers have had a new lease of life, the blood has moved through the veins of the Welsh economy again. The mining villages have lost their air of hopelessness, their men no longer have the grey look of prisoners of war which long years of unemployment had given them, and their children are no longer the pathetic white faced ghosts that they were before 1939. But all this is dominated by the fear that it will not last. People remember the prosperity of the last war and the steady decline which followed it. Those who have lived right through long depression find it hard to believe that good times can come back again permanently, and already the unemployment figures in some districts have reached alarming proportions.

The good times will not come back in the old form, and it is doubtful whether Wales can ever know prosperity on the scale of previous generations. But the future is not entirely hopeless. Sixty small factories were started by refugees from central Europe in Wales during the war, and the Trading Estates started before 1939 have prospered. The Labour Government have announced a vigorous policy of development in South Wales, and there is a chance that South Wales will become a medium sized industrial centre with a more balanced and better planned economy than it knew in the past, when everything depended on coal, iron and tin-plate. The countryside may reasonably expect a fate similar to the English countryside, while Wales should enjoy a fair share of the promised development of the tourist trade, especially in the north and west.

The industrial future of Wales is, then, slightly more hopeful than seemed possible in 1939. What of the future of Wales as a nation? Against the industrial readjustment made possible by the war has to be set the still further uprooting and unsettling of the young people of Wales which it has brought. Many will have benefited from the wider experience, but five or six years in the armed

forces are likely to be as enervating for a large number of young Welshmen and girls as five or six years in a factory at Slough or Dagenham. Already the life of the valleys had suffered from the disintegration brought by the motor car and the cinema and the dance-hall, as well as by the depression, and these forces are not likely to decrease in the future. But the Welsh tradition is giving plenty of evidence that it is by no means dead, and it is showing surprising vitality in unexpected directions. The Nationalist Movement is a negligible force politically, but some of the new intelligentzia being slowly produced by the Welsh university are being attracted to it. All the Nationalist candidates in the 1945 election forfeited their deposits except the candidate for the Welsh university seat. And nationalism cannot be dismissed as a mere political fad. Although most Welshmen, especially those on the Left, would accuse it of complete unrealism in pretending that there is any salvation for Wales except in the context of a British economic and political system, it does provide a platform for some shrewd criticisms of current Welsh and English life, which many who do not share its political aims would agree with, and it does create a frame of reference in which some forms of Welsh cultural life can develop. Certainly it looks at present as though the only hope of the development of a vigorous and independent Welsh university life seems to lie with the development of the Welsh Nationalist Movement. The very interesting and enlightened Welsh youth movement, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, founded in the 1920's, is now beginning to bear fruit in the life of the people. And the despised bourgeoisie of the suburbia of the big towns, the butt of intellectuals for a long time, have produced a surprising amount of literature which, as the so-called Anglo-Welsh movement, has enjoyed quite a vogue in the last few years. This movement, which is reflected in the Faber Book of Modern Welsh Verse, is despised by many Nationalists as bogus, and its literary productions are certainly uneven, but it is at least refreshing evidence of cultural vitality in an unexpected quarter.

WALES AND THE CHURCHES

The churches are very much at the parting of the ways in Wales to-day. The dislocation of the war has affected church attendance as in England. But the return of material prosperity which it has brought has enabled churches to pay off the debts which crippled them during the depression and slightly to improve the stipends of their ministers. It is clear, however, that if the churches are to maintain their weakening grip on Welsh life they will have to conceive their task in very different terms and alter their strategy in the Wales of the future. It was stated earlier that Wales was a young but rapidly maturing culture. The churches gave birth to modern Wales, but the child shows signs of outstripping the mother and the mother does not seem as concerned as she might be to keep up with the child. As the products of the Welsh educational system

move out into an ever-widening world they find the churches increasingly unable to give them guidance for that world. This is, of course, not universally true, but the tendency of the churches, especially the Welsh-speaking churches, is to retain the outlook and structure of corporate life which they had when Wales was a country of small self-enclosed and self-educated mining towns and farming communities. Welsh preaching is still often more adult and profound than English preaching is, but the churches show little awareness of the problems of modern industrial society outside those places which have been hard-hit by depression and give very little Christian cultural education to those of their children who have to find their way through the complexities of life in the twentieth century. For the most part, they still content themselves with their round of preaching festivals and singing festivals, their little Eisteddfods and social evenings, and have not found adequate spiritual equivalents of the old fellowship meetings and adult Sunday schools which did much to build up the strong life of the Welsh churches in the past.

It is perhaps more obviously true of the churches of Wales than of those of any other part of Britain that they need a new and more effective relationship to the secular order if they are to survive. The Welsh churches have had many eloquent orators. What they need to-day are prophets and statesmen who can make available to the people of Wales the guidance of God for this time in terms of their own particular situation and who can press forward to the revivifying and reorganization of church life in obedience to that guidance. Although the Welsh churches have had an intense congregational life there has been little strong churchmanship or consciousness of the Church as a universal divine society to be ordered in all things by the divine ordinance. It is partly because of this that there appears to be little strong impulse towards reunion in Wales, even though some forms of reunion are obviously indispensable to the effective reorganization of church life to meet the modern situation. There is considerable affinity and some readiness to co-operate between all the leading denominations in Wales. Even the Church in Wales has more in common with some of the other bodies than the Church of England has with most English nonconformity. But there is little sense of a passionate desire to heal the broken body of Christ, and most denominations are content to go on as they are, enjoying fraternal relations with the other bodies but never really growing nearer them. Yet it is clear that Wales has too many denominations, too many churches and too many ill-paid and ill-educated ministers for her needs. It is not unusual for small market towns of twelve hundred inhabitants to have five large churches and as many ministers, while neither the resources nor the men are available for performing special ministries in the worlds of industry, education and the universities.

Wales, like Scotland and Ireland, remains a land of church-going people, even though the decline has been startling and rapid in recent years. There is still time, however, for Wales to learn a lesson from the secularization of English life and retrieve the situation before it is too late. But to do so needs an effort of self-criticism, re-organization and overhauling of antiquated machinery which the churches appear reluctant to contemplate. The churches are sufficiently successful as going concerns at present to hide from themselves the necessity of radical change. But unless radical changes take place it is hard to see how the Welsh churches can survive the next generations as a significant force.

Signs are not wanting, however, of movements towards such changes. The revival of understanding of the Church as an integral part of the Gospel which has taken place in modern Protestantism is beginning to affect the life of the Welsh churches and its influence is likely to grow. Small groups up and down the country are producing work on the Welsh pattern of life which do represent an attempt to relate the common life of the Welsh churches to the realities of the secular order.[1] A group of Catholic-minded younger clergy in the Church in Wales produce a very well-edited periodical for young people called "Cymry'r Groes," which helps to form Christian judgements about art, literature and the films. There are signs also of attempts to renew the close links between the churches and politics, both through nationalism and through a revival of Welsh radicalism in the context of the Labour Movement. The Roman Catholic Church has created much attention recently by the conversion to its ranks of some prominent leaders of the Nationalist party, and it may have a future among Welsh intellectuals because it provides them with an integrated outlook on life which Welsh Protestantism cannot at present offer. It is hard to see, however, how it can make much headway among the rank and file of the chapel-going Welsh in the measurable future, despite the declared policy of the hierarchy to ensure that its priests should learn the Welsh language.

THE FUTURE OF WALES

The future of Wales is more problematical even than that of any other part of Britain. Its economic, cultural, and religious futures are bound up together with peculiar intimacy, and prophecy about any of them is extremely difficult. Certain things need doing very clearly. Church life must be re-organized and the churches must learn to work together far more effectively as one Christian community. The churches must gain a new and more informed concern for Christian duty in the secular order. In particular they must obtain a more significant relationship to the life of the Welsh

[1] Significant examples are the *Study Outline on Wales* by Emlyn Davies published by the S.C.M. Press for 1s., and *The Welsh Pattern*, produced by the Llanmadoc Religion and Life Fellowship, obtainable from St. John's Vicarage, Pontypridd, 1s.

university which has grown up as an institution largely independently of the chapels which first nourished and inspired it.[1] It is imperative that the promised economic rehabilitation of Wales should take place and that the policy of transfer of population be dropped. Whether all this can be done, however, depends on whether Welshmen are prepared to realize the extent of the changes which are needed in Wales and also whether English people are prepared to give enough intelligent and discriminating sympathy to Wales.

Wales has been in the past, and can be in the future, a great asset to the Christian life of these islands. Her church-centred, working-class culture is a rare enough fruit of Christian civilization to justify strenuous efforts to preserve and strengthen it. To maintain it, however, Welsh Christians must forswear all complacency, and since many decisions affecting the future of Wales lie outside Welsh control the rest of us must do all in our power not to connive at its destruction by carelessness or indifference. The great host of Welshmen who have gone into England and found an effective sphere of life there have a great responsibility in this matter. Artificial barriers between Wales and England which prevent the coming and going of people and ideas between the nations are obviously undesirable, but if Wales is to flourish in its vigour and distinctiveness in the midst of a civilization where the odds are heavily against the survival of small peoples with their distinctive cultures, this deeply-wounded country needs the most scrupulous respect for her individuality. It is true that the Welsh have something of an inferiority complex. They have much to learn from England and are not always apt or reasonable pupils. But they have also much to give and they are not helped to give it by thoughtlessness and tolerant contempt. At a time like the present, when we need to build up anew the Christian resources of our country, to allow Wales, which has been one of the best natural communities and centres of Christian nurture in these islands, to disappear except as a holiday haunt for London and the Midlands, would be a piece of careless folly for which we might have to pay heavily in the future.

D. J.

[1] Despite the fact that most of its students come from Christian homes. A recent survey of students entering the University College of Aberystwyth disclosed that four out of five students were the sons or daughters of ministers or deacons.

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